

## Discovery AND disorder

Discovery is not a straightforward process, if it were some of us would be out of the job. However this should not excuse unpredictable tools and searches; some obstacles are reasonable to expect and some are not. How would a 110m hurdler feel if an extra barrier were added or if the first was moved 10ft forward? The answer is that we'd only know how they felt if we asked them or maybe observed their next race. The focus of this post is not intended to be UX though, but instead teaching, specifically how we talk to our users about fallible discovery services.

The anomaly that has prompted this post is the re-ordering of results when inserting AND between search terms in Ex Libris Primo (as of March 8th this appears to be happening at 15 Russell Group Libraries). This can be tested by typing the search terms **academic integrity** into your discovery tool, then **academic AND integrity**, and comparing the two. Although the number of results stays the same, some of you will see that the order of the items changes. Predominantly this appears to be a Primo issue (although is not happening everywhere with Primo) but Summon has its own mysteries. If you compare the above two searches in Summon, at several Russell Group libraries you will get a different number of results (although admittedly only a very slight difference).

The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education establishes "Searching as Strategic Exploration" as one of its six concepts, furthermore explaining that "searching for information is often nonlinear" (ACRL 2015). However is this intended to excuse tools giving inconsistent results or instead explain that searching is an iterative process, or both? Yes, if we're teaching our users to search for resources in a strategic and systematic way we should also be showing them the other databases we subscribe to and not solely relying on our discovery tools, but shouldn't this be providing a solid foundation on which to build? If our discovery services are not as good as they can possibly be, students will very quickly turn to Google instead.

When we have noticed anomalies we have reported them to Ex Libris who have worked to resolve them or provided an answer as to why certain things are happening. The answer to a previous irregularity was that "the results of different searches aren't necessarily comparable in a linear relation" (Ex Libris Knowledge Center, 2017). Is this a satisfactory response though? Within the Library we continue to user test our discovery tool (as do Ex Libris) and during our next round of testing we may find that students don't mind these minor aberrations or perhaps are already used to shifting results from using Google. It could be that they haven't asked, or even noticed, but as information professionals we should be ready to help those looking for the answer. Evidently including/excluding AND between search terms does make a difference, perhaps not to the number of results but certainly to the way they are ordered. I cannot currently explain to users why this is happening or which set of results really is more relevant. What I can do is show them other ways of sorting and narrowing their searches. Like that first 110m hurdle, it is an obstacle that can still be cleared, I just feel I would be a better coach if I could explain why it's moved 10ft forward.

## References

ACRL (2015) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. Available at: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#exploration> (Accessed: 5 March 2017).

Ex Libris Knowledge Center (2017) *Boolean searches in Primo don't work as expected*. Available at: [https://knowledge.exlibrisgroup.com/Primo/Knowledge\\_Articles/Boolean\\_searches\\_in\\_Primo\\_does\\_n't\\_work\\_as\\_expected](https://knowledge.exlibrisgroup.com/Primo/Knowledge_Articles/Boolean_searches_in_Primo_does_n't_work_as_expected) (Accessed: 5 March 2017).